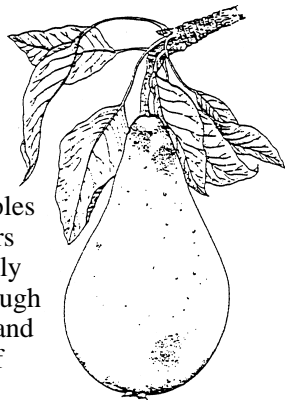


## Horticulture

### Hints for Fruit Storage



Proper storage conditions are needed for fruits that are not consumed immediately after harvest. The key to good storage is in controlling the temperature and relative humidity of the storage area. For fruits such as apples, grapes and pears, store them in cool temperatures at 32 to 40 degrees Fahrenheit and moist conditions at 90 to 95 percent relative humidity. Other fruits should be canned or frozen after harvest.

Select containers for storage that have smooth inner surfaces. Baskets, melon crates or boxes are suitable. Line these containers with aluminum foil to help retain moisture.

Apples and pears will likely last through the fall and winter if stored properly. Apple varieties should be harvested firm and ripe to insure the longest storage possible.

Harvest pears when they are full sized but still green and hard. Pears ripen quickly at 60 to 65 degrees Fahrenheit.

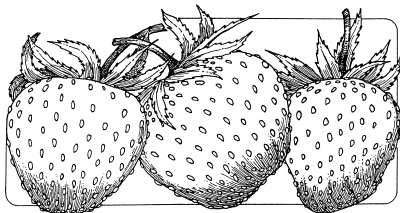
Grapes will usually keep for one or two months. Grapes should be stored alone because they pick up odors of other fruits and vegetables. (MJF)

### Winter Care For Strawberry Plants

Strawberry plants have already formed their flower buds for next spring. These flower buds can not stand temperatures below 20 degrees Fahrenheit.

Exposure to temperatures lower than this will result in the loss of some of the earlier and bigger strawberries next spring. Snow cover can act as a mulch and protect your strawberry crop.

While the strawberry plants are lush and green hold off mulching them for the winter. Only when night temperatures are forecast to go below 20 degrees Fahrenheit should you



consider mulching. Apply any coarse mulch, such as straw, to a depth of three inches. The mulching blanket will help protect the berries through the winter.

You may want to go out and uncover the plants if there is a warming trend forecasted after you have applied the mulch. (MJF)

### Harvesting Popcorn

There are no shortcuts to popcorn harvest. Popcorn must mature on the stalk. In a normal year, it takes about 120 days from seed to harvest.

The kernels are usually hard and ready to harvest by the time the stalks turn brown and dry. The husks will be dry also. Harvest before cool, damp weather settles in, to prevent the possibility of mold growth.

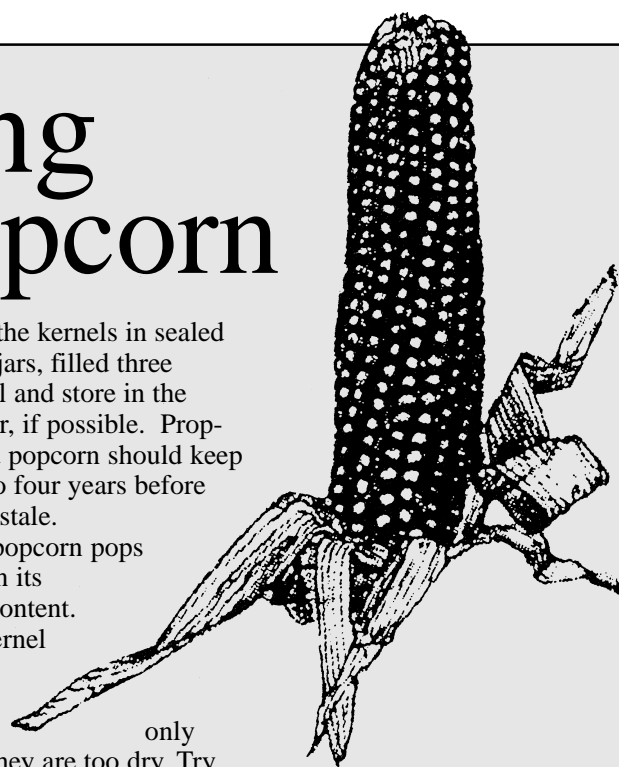
After picking the ears, remove the husks and cure the ears for two or three weeks. To cure, place them in a mesh bag and hang in a warm, dry, well ventilated place. After curing, remove the kernels by rubbing one ear against another, starting at the tip and working toward the base.

Store the kernels in sealed one-quart jars, filled three fourths full and store in the refrigerator, if possible. Properly stored popcorn should keep for three to four years before becoming stale.

How popcorn pops depends on its moisture content. If many kernel remain unpopped or pop only partially, they are too dry. Try adding one tablespoon of water per quart jar and shaking the jar twice a day for a couple of days. If a test popping shows kernels are still too dry, repeat the process once.

If kernels are too moist, they will pop very slowly with a loud

explosion and steam may rise from the popper. To encourage moisture loss, leave the popcorn storage container unsealed until a test popping shows the kernels are properly cured. (MJF)



### Aloes, Easy and Fun to Grow

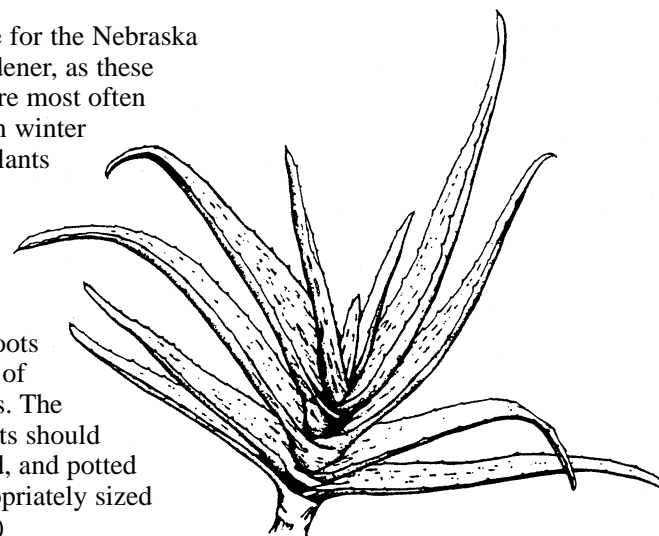
The true aloe or medicine plant is the ideal plant for people who tend to forget to water their house plants.

The aloe prefers cool temperatures around 70 degrees Fahrenheit during the day, with a night temperature of 50 to 55 degrees Fahrenheit.

Aloes prefer full sun and a well drained soil. They should be kept only barely moist, as saturated soil conditions will lead to root rot diseases. Healthy specimens produce spectacular red, yellow or orange blossoms under outdoor conditions. This is

unfortunate for the Nebraska indoor gardener, as these blossoms are most often produced in winter when the plants would be indoors.

Aloes may be propagated from offshoots of the base of older plants. The young plants should be removed, and potted up in appropriately sized pots. (MJF)



### Pine Cones For Decoration

While you are outside enjoying the cool winter days, you may notice that many evergreens have attractive pine cones that you could use to decorate your home during the holiday season.

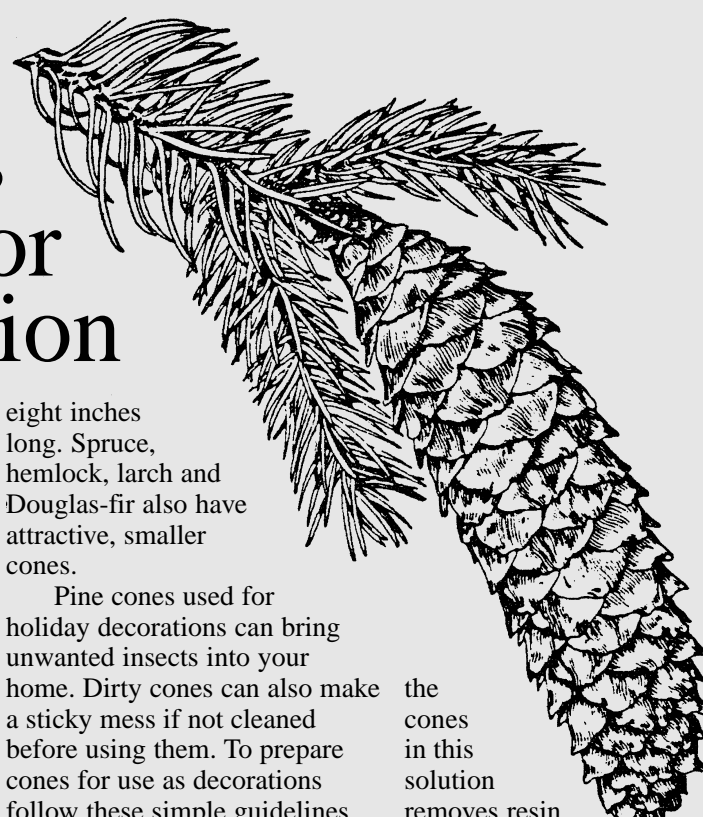
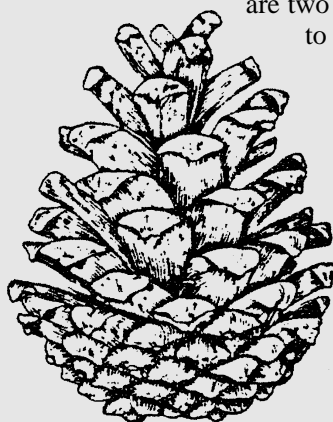
Pine trees such as eastern white pine, ponderosa pine, Scotch pine and Austrian pine all have nice sized cones that are two to

eight inches long. Spruce, hemlock, larch and Douglas-fir also have attractive, smaller cones.

Pine cones used for holiday decorations can bring unwanted insects into your home. Dirty cones can also make a sticky mess if not cleaned before using them. To prepare cones for use as decorations follow these simple guidelines. Fill an old pail half full with hot water. Add a cup of chlorine bleach and enough laundry soap to make light suds. Drop in the cones, a dozen at a time, then stir the solution and cones for a few minutes. Do not use your bare hands because a strong chlorine bleach solution will cause skin irritation. Washing

the cones in this solution removes resin, dust and insects. Lift out the cones and rinse in clean water. Do not let the cones soak in water because they will darken.

Use the pine cones to decorate your home, wreaths and floral arrangements. After the holidays store them away for next year. (MJF)



#### Horticulture information center

NUFACTS  
24 hours a day, 7 days a week  
1-800-832-5441; or  
441-7188 in the Lincoln area



To listen to a NUFACTS information center message, call the number above on a touch-tone phone, then enter a three-digit number listed below. Call 441-7180 to receive a brochure with all the NUFACTS message topics. (MJF)

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- 124 Wood for Fireplace
- 157 Winter Rose Care
- 170 Spring Bulb Forcing
- 173 Climbing Roses
- 210 Amaryllis
- 212 Swedish Ivy
- 213 Prayer Plant
- 214 Houseplant Insects
- 217 Boston Fern
- 218 African Violet Care
- 222 Winter Houseplant Care
- 223 Repotting Houseplants
- 224 Houseplant Artificial Light
- 236 Strawberry Winter Care
- 289 Wood Ash in Garden